

# Health experts report US\$246 billion cost of workplace depression across eight countries

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New data released today shows that workplace depression is a major issue across different cultures and economies, with "wide and devastating" consequences for thousands of organisations worldwide.

In a study of eight countries spanning diverse cultures and GDP, researchers from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) say depression is collectively costing the nations of Brazil, Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Mexico, South Africa and the USA more than US\$246 billion a year.

Data from a survey of 8000 employees across these countries reveals that more highly educated employees, in particular, have a more negative impact if they remain at work while depressed. This is because they are more likely to manage others and the knock-on effects are felt down the line.

This is the first study of its kind in the world to analyse the impact of depression on [workplace productivity](#) across a range of countries that differ both culturally and economically.

The findings follow on the heels of a major European study on workplace depression by the same researchers in March 2014, signalling an urgent need for employers to take a more pro-active approach to tackling mental health issues.

Lead researcher Dr Sara Evans-Lacko says the enormous costs of

depression due to absence and loss of productivity are set to increase unless governments and employers make it a priority.

The study, published online today in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, also reveals:

- On average, 1% of a country's GDP is lost due to workers with depression attending work while unwell (i.e. presenteeism). The collective cost for the eight countries is £175 billion;
- Absenteeism is higher than presenteeism in Japan due to people's fear of losing their job if their depression is revealed at work;
- The costs of employees attending work while dealing with depression is 5-10 times higher than those who take time off work to recover from depression;
- The USA (\$84.7 billion) and Brazil (\$63.3 billion) experience the highest productivity losses due to presenteeism;
- Less than 10% of respondents in China (6.4%) and South Korea (7.4%) reported having a previous diagnosis of depression compared to more than 20% in Canada, 22.7% in the USA and 25.6% in South Africa;
- Asian countries report lower productivity losses due to depression, attributed in part to a cultural reluctance to disclose mental health issues, so the actual figures (above) relating to China and South Korea are likely to be higher;
- Japan, however, has the highest aggregate costs associated with employees taking time off for depression, with 22% (costing \$14 billion) of people taking 21 or more days. This suggests that employees stay at work longer until their depression is severe;
- The prevalence of depression in South Africa (25.6%) is nearly two times higher than the average (15.7%) reported across the eight countries;
- Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting up to 350 million people, according to the World Health

## Organisation.

"These findings suggest that depression is an issue deserving global attention, regardless of a country's economic development, national income or culture," Dr Evans-Lacko says. "The growth of mental illness worldwide also suggests the scale of the problem is likely to increase."

The data provides compelling evidence for global workplace programmes to be implemented to address [mental health issues](#), Dr Evans-Lacko adds.

"Interventions which support employees with depression need to be developed, adapted, implemented and evaluated across all countries to mitigate the high costs of workplace depression."

**More information:** S. Evans-Lacko et al. Global patterns of workplace productivity for people with depression: absenteeism and presenteeism costs across eight diverse countries, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-016-1278-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-016-1278-4)

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